



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

September 1, 2004

Ms. M. Ann Montgomery  
Assistant Ellis County & District Attorney  
Temporary Administration Building  
1201 North Highway 77, Suite B  
Waxahachie, Texas 75165

OR2004-7446

Dear Ms. Montgomery:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 211211.

The Ellis County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff") received a request for the entire report on named defendants. The sheriff has released some of the requested information to the requestor. You claim that the remaining requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.103, and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

We note the submitted information includes a search warrant affidavit. The affidavit to support a search warrant is made public by statute if the search warrant has been executed. *See* Crim. Proc. Code art. 18.01(b). Therefore, the sheriff must release the search warrant affidavit we have marked.

In addition, the submitted information also includes a search warrant, a search warrant return, and one warning of rights that were filed with a court but have not been released. Information filed with a court is generally a matter of public record and may not be withheld from disclosure unless it is confidential under other law. Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(17); *Star-Telegram, Inc. v. Walker*, 834 S.W.2d 54 (Tex. 1992). You claim that these documents are excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103 and 552.108. However, sections 552.103 and 552.108 are discretionary exceptions that protect a governmental body's interests and may be waived. As such, sections 552.103 and 552.108 are not other law that makes

information confidential for the purposes of section 552.022. *See Dart Area Rapid Transit v. Dallas Morning News*, 4 S.W.3d 469 (Tex.App.—Dallas 1999, no pet.) (governmental body may waive section 552.103), Open Records Decision No. 177 (1977) (law enforcement exception may be waived by governmental body); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 522 (1989) (discretionary exceptions in general). Therefore, the search warrant, search warrant return, and warning of rights we have marked may not be withheld pursuant to section 552.103 or 552.108 and must be released under section 552.022(a)(17).

Next, we will consider your section 552.108 claim for the remaining information. Section 552.108(a) excepts from disclosure "[i]nformation held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime . . . if: (1) release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime." Generally, a governmental body claiming section 552.108 must reasonably explain how and why the release of the requested information would interfere with law enforcement. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.108(a)(1), (b)(1), .301(e)(1)(a); *see also Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977). You state that the remaining information relates to a pending criminal case. Based upon this representation, we conclude that release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. *See Houston Chronicle Publ'g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975), *writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976) (court delineates law enforcement interests that are present in active cases).

We note, however, that information normally found on the front page of an offense report is generally considered public.<sup>1</sup> *See generally* Gov't Code § 552.108(c); *Houston Chronicle Publ'g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975), *writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976); Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976). Thus, you must release the types of information that are considered to be front page offense report information, even if this information is not actually located on the front page of the offense report. Although section 552.108(a)(1) authorizes you to withhold the remaining information from disclosure, you may choose to release all or part of the information at issue that is not otherwise confidential by law. *See* Gov't Code § 552.007. As our ruling on this issue is dispositive, we need not address your other arguments.

In summary, the sheriff must release the search warrant, search warrant affidavit, search warrant return, warning of rights, and front page offense report information. You may withhold the remaining information from disclosure under section 552.108(a)(1).

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<sup>1</sup>Generally, basic information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle Publ'g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975), *writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976), is not excepted from public disclosure under section 552.103 of the Government Code. Open Records Decision No. 597 (1991).

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code

§ 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Tamara L. Harswick". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tamara L Harswick  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

TLH/sdk

Ref: ID# 211211

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Judy Story  
349 Pleasureland Road  
Mabank, Texas 75156  
(w/o enclosures)